



CHAPTER II.



"I will answer for Mr. Hall's dreams to-night."

When we returned to town in the middle of September I was all agog to dash through thick and thin, and all the more impatient because I knew that two months must yet elapse before the season would fairly begin. A visit to Letty when her family came home from Newport and Olive Gracie's garden party helped to stay my dream to a small extent; and, as every week passed by, I used to see one or two of the men, whom by that time I knew, strolling through Blitzenhouse square or walking in Walnut street. Mr. Boulter insisted on rowing me up the river. I think he would willingly have had me take supper with him at Strawberry mansion quite by ourselves, but I positively refused to row with him alone except in the morning; and I only did it once, being a little disturbed, I confess, by the other men at the boat house. Not that I was afraid of them; but I did not want to be talked about, and at that time did not know enough to discriminate. I would gladly have been rowed by him for days together, however, for he looked admirable in flannels.

At last came the great event—Mrs. Hawthorne's dinner for Letty.

I feel again my thrill of delight on hearing our door bell ring as I stood in my room on that well remembered evening, for I knew that it must be Olive Gracie, who had promised to come for me in her coupe. I scarcely waited for the little maid to tell me that the carriage had come, but kissed my mother affectionately, gave a peck at my sister Bessy, who had been bedeviling me a good deal with persistent questions and suggestions, and flew down stairs in order to secure my family demonstration on the doorstep. I found Olive in quite a whirl of excitement. Her wildness infected me, and when we rushed in from the dark street to the blazing hall at the Hawthornes I felt almost ready to rush into the little ante-room, through the half open door of which I caught a glimpse of masculine figures and heard a snarl of masculine laughter, exclaim a fandangio and dance out again, just by way of prelude to the evening's diversion.

But I was sobered by suddenly finding myself in Letty's room face to face with two or three girls whom I did not know, and with Letty Biquet, who instantly tried to snub me, and my thoughts were turned to the graver aspect of the situation. I threw off my cloak and carefully inspected myself, and then hastened to the assistance of Olive, who had misplaced a ribbon or lost a pin, and presently we went down to the parlor where stood Mrs. Hawthorne, minus a dress and a little flushed, was looking very pretty and a little flushed. The men were all on the field before us, and in a very short time we had formed our procession and were parading into the dining room.

I was taken in by Mr. Mason Temple, as I had expected. Indeed, when Letty of fered me my choice among the men I determined upon him. I looked at Mr. Boulter, it is true, but I did not dare to ask for him, and I remembered that when Mr. Temple saw me sitting on a haycock at the Gracie's garden party he told Olive that I made the prettiest Phyllis he had ever beheld, and so I named him for my Amour. When I announced my determination to Letty she said, that as I had declared for sentiment she would see that I did not lose any worldly advantage, and that she would put Mr. Charter on the other side of me.

"Marry" Temple, as everybody called him, was a tall, slight young man, with a good humored countenance, who made fun of himself when nobody else could be found for a victim, who was something of a dandy, and supposed to be a contributor to the magazines. Mr. Algernon Purfax Van Stronach Penn Charter (his mother had been one of the Van Stronachs and her father a Purfax) possessed a pedigree before which Englishmen might have bowed, and gymnastic ability which was said to be the delight of professional—in addition to which he was of considerable fortune, very fond of entertaining, and, as he was accustomed to call himself, "a well known sportsman." Between these two young men I felt exultantly divided, and, to my surprise, perfectly calm.

I looked around the table as I drew off my gloves. It was a large dinner—twenty-six, I think—and Letty had made it up very carefully. It was supposed to contain the choicest of the men to society and the most promising of the buds of the season. It was quite a distance from one end of the long table to the other, and the room looked magnificent, with its high walls covered with family portraits, and this splendid glittering paraffinogram in the very middle under the chandelier. I looked down the row of faces; everybody was talking and laughing—there was a rattle of conversation. I laughed softly to myself and dreamed on the table. The cloth was delicately white; my fingers looked so smooth and clean and delicate that I quite fell in love with them.

The plate before me was Sevres; a lovely basket of Jacqueminot roses was placed in front of it; any number of bewildering wine glasses, some cut glass, some Bohemian, stood at hand; the silver was King pattern. Further off was a gorgeous epagoge, round the corner of which I could see Olive smiling at me. I drew a long breath in the fullness of my joy, and, as Mr. Temple was looking away, I turned to Mr. Charter and beamed upon him. His face lighted up in a remarkably sudden manner, and he gently took my dinner card, which I had been twirling in my fingers, and proposed to draw a diagram of the table as it for me.

He took up a ray champagne bottle which dangled from his watch chain, out of which he had shot a little pencil, and

then, before beginning his task, and as it with a fresh access of hope, begged me to exchange my dinner card for his. Mr. Temple, who had by this time turned round, objected strongly to Mr. Charter's plans; and of course the latter persisted, though he ought to have been attending to his own girl. They both appealed to me so violently that I was a little afraid of making a mistake, and felt for a moment that it would be better to keep my card as a safe method of settling the dispute, but I quickly recovered myself, and bade Mr. Temple remember that he had taken his eyes off me, and naturally ought to suffer for it. Mr. Charter accordingly kept my card, and began writing the names of the party for me on his own. A labor, much interrupted by scornful remarks from Mr. Temple, who, I instantly saw, could be very amusing if he wished.

In the course of time Mr. Charter finished the card, and presented it to me with an air of triumph; but his face fell when I allowed Mr. Temple to persuade me to accept his boutonniere and give him one of my roses in place of it. Up to this time I had felt a little that I ought not to encourage another girl's man too much; but my conscience hardened with my success, especially as Mr. Charter had taken in Letty Biquet, to whom I owed a grudge for her behavior to me in the dressing room, and I now laid myself out to keep both men talking to me as long as possible, so I smiled at all Mr. Charter's somewhat glaring compliments. I called Mr. Temple's quotations, I shook my head with a look that might have meant anything at the insinuations of each about the other, till finally round Mr. Charter found that his wailing powers were not so good as those of his adversary, and turned to Letty with a somewhat guilty look. She, as I hoped, and subsequently was assured, was angry enough to have upset the salad dressing over me.

As Mr. Charter turned away, Mr. Temple gave vent to a prodigious sigh of pretended relief. "At last I have you to myself," said he.

"But you have been talking to me all the evening," I answered.

"Mr. Charter has been listening to me too."

"Do you grudge me the attention of another man? Oh, how selfish is your sex!"

"Rather, how grasping is yours! You have made me wait till now for an opportunity to say what you know I have been dying to say to you."

As he murmured these last words his face wore an expression of the most intense earnestness—but there was a twinkle in the corner of his eye. I determined if he was going to be outrageous I would be outrageous too.

"Perhaps," I said, with an air of diffidence, "perhaps I was afraid to listen to you."

I saw that he would have liked to laugh, but did not wish to spoil the flirtation.

"May I say it?" he whispered again, in passionate tones.

I pretended to look at my fan, and then turned round to him. "Yes," I said.

He pretended to hesitate. "And yet I dare not, so soon," he said. Then he began to repeat:

"Si vous croyez que je vais dire  
Qui j'ose aimer,  
Je ne saurais pour un empire  
Vous le nommer!"

I was staggered by this; I had not expected him to be indirect. I laid down my fork and looked at him with moist agitation. "Oh, be explicit!" I cried. "Do not fear! let me encourage you!"

A slight smile flickered round his lips for a moment. Then his face grew grave and he said in a low tone. "Heaven! how beautiful your eyes are!"

I was caught. I blushed—flushed—I had to surrender. I laughed till I blushed again for laughing, and then laughed for blushing again.

After this our flirtation had to stop altogether or take a more really serious turn. I shall leave the reader to imagine upon which course we decided. I am very glad that Mr. Temple was not mischievous, for I might easily have been induced to disgrace myself. He was sufficiently to blame for making me flirt with him as wildly as I did—though, after all, it made very little difference, for every girl at the table was almost as excited as I was myself. When the crackers were being pulled I looked round again—my first general glance since the beginning of dinner. Everybody was talking at once; private raids were being made upon the dishes of fruits and sweetmeats—a candle fell down in front of Mr. Boulter, who picked it up, righted it and quietly fixed it upon the plate of the girl next to him, who was looking at the man on the other side of her blew it out, and the girl herself laughing and exclaiming with both of them.

But now, much to my disgust, Mrs. Hawthorne rose to lead us girls from the room. I followed her with a sigh, which Mr. Temple, in choking tones, immediately declared he echoed. He had previously, during the course of the dinner, much deplored the custom which made men remain at table after the women went to the parlor, but declared that he had not the moral courage to break through it. As we edged slowly toward the door I offered him another rose from my basket if he would accompany me to the parlor on this occasion, but he said that he wouldn't do so, for the other men and that his doctor had ordered him to smoke "for a cruel nervous disease." I came very near telling him that I wished I could stay with him; and, indeed, I did wish to do so most violently, this desire being much stronger than the conflicting desire to go and talk it over with the girls, for I knew fairly well what they would say, and I positively ached to hear the male comments on the dinner, and I had a feeling that I should like to try a cigarette.

When the girls got together again in the parlor there was a buzz of "my dears," but after a minute or two we began to adjust ribbons and lace, and to comment each other's appearance. This necessary duty being over, we began once more to talk over our fellow men. Olive Gracie broke away from a little knot of girls and rushed toward me. "Girls," she cried out, "did you ever see anything so barefaced as Ethel's flirting?" Several of my friends made a group about me, and for a moment or two I was a target for all manner of accusations till I was able to restrain my choking laughter and retort in kind. Milly Mortmain caused much excitement by declaring that she had extracted from an anonymous man at the dancing class the night before an opinion about every girl in society; but as when she was met by the immediate question, "Oh, Milly, what did he say about me?" she vowed that she was bound to secrecy, it was generally assumed that she was endeavoring to keep on her toes, and no girl would have

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tate to break such a promise as that. By the time we had finished our coffee I know I was quite ready for the men to join us, and I fancy that most of the girls felt as I did, but we were forced to wait for some time, while every now and then we heard the most tantalizing bursts of laughter from below. At last they appeared, Mr. Temple leading the way. I expected him to make for my side, but it seemed understood that the men were to talk no more to their partners at the table, but were to devote themselves to other things. Just as I began to fancy that Bran Boulter was looking in my direction a tall, distinguished looking man who had been presented to me before dinner, and whom I had some difficulty in remembering as Mr. Middleton Hall, came up to me.

He bowed with a grave elegance of manner, and began at once, not a little to my surprise, to speak to me of my father, whom he said he remembered with feelings of great respect and gratitude. He explained to me the reason; it was only, I think, that about the time when he was admitted to the bar he made a great blunder through which a very important case in which my father was interested was nearly lost, and that my father, instead of being very angry, treated him with much kindness and patience. I confess that this conversation of Mr. Hall jarred on me. The topic was quite at variance with my lively mood, and when Mr. Hall spoke of my father I could not help feeling slightly irksome. But though Mr. Hall's presence was somewhat irksome to me at first, I found myself after some time becoming interested in his conversation.

He began by asking me, but without any of the customary affectation, how I liked going about, and then, instead of annoying me with stale compliments and threadbare prophecies, talked very sensibly and very well about the necessity for social intercourse and the impropriety of judging the aims and effects of society by the internal feelings of pleasure or disappointment experienced by any member of it. "If," said he, "we are called upon to decide between the fanatic hermit and the empty-headed fop, we are apt to declare in favor of the former, since his actions appear to us at least to be grounded upon reflection; yet in many cases we might find the hermit was actuated only by the sting of the disappointment, the sway of avarice, the suggestions of spite and resentment, or the inability to conquer some morbid physical propensity—and that he possessed, no more than the fashionable butterfly, a logical conclusion by which to justify his habits and actions."

"I don't mean to say," said he, smiling, "that I think a fop the most admirable object in nature, but I'm not sure that he deserves all the abuse heaped upon him. And I dare say a misanthropist might just as well cloak his feelings under the disguise of folly as proclaim them in the character of a hermit." He said a good deal more, to which I listened intently, feeling quite sorry to have him go when he rose to leave me, and I stopped him eagerly when he began to apologize for the dryness of his conversation. As he moved away a voice behind me said:

"I will answer for Mr. Hall's dreams to-night."

I turned to behold Bran Boulter leaning toward me. I need not repeat what he said. It was the second time that evening that I had been complimented on my eyes. Some of the girls were by this time going off to a small dance at Leila Girard's, and so we gathered together round the little tea table, and Letty made us all take a second cup of tea. What a jolly hour we spent together! Bran Boulter and Mason Temple were more amusing than I had ever imagined anybody could be; and though I afterward discovered the innate spitefulness of that little wretch Hamelin Towne, at that time I could not but be delighted with his descriptions of people and his mimicry. Bran Boulter and Mason Temple put us into the carriage, and Bran gave my hand an exceedingly affectionate squeeze as he said goodbye—and I'm not sure that I didn't return it. As we rattled up the street—of course Mrs. Gracie's coupe was not built to be run on the car tracks—I grasped Olive's hand and said:

"Haven't it been just too perfect for anything?"

"Goodness, yes," she answered. "I could dine forever!"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

OPPOSED TO SUB-TREASURY.

How the Desired Effect of the Sub-Treasury May Be Accomplished—Hickory Grove Alliance.

Resolution passed by the Hickory Grove Alliance No. 2101, June 13, 1891: It having been made our duty by the last State Alliance to discuss and pass upon the sub-treasury plan, and this being the meeting for the final decision of this lodge, and that our position, hence faith, may be known; therefore be it

Resolved by Hickory Grove Alliance No. 2101, Freestone county,

1. That we oppose the sub-treasury plan, both in principle and detail.

2. That to accomplish the desired effect of the sub-treasury plan we favor:

1. Reduction of exorbitant salaries and excessive expenditures.

2. A collection of the national banking system.

Advice to Mothers.

Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup for children teething, soothes the inflamed gums, and keeps the child comfortable, and is the best remedy for diarrhoea, 25 cents a bottle.

Does That Cure It?

Special to the Gazette.

RAYMOND, EASTLAND COUNTY, TEX., June 24.—W. W. Taylor and Dave Woods, neighboring farmers, met here to-day and became involved in a quarrel over Taylor's dogs which had been depredating on Woods' corn field. Woods cut Taylor severely in the left shoulder and arm.

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